FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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OFFICE OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS MESSAGE CENTER

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FROM : Leopoldville 54 April 13, 1950.

REF :

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SUBJECT : Reaction to Royal Question in Belgian Congo.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

EUR INDEX

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EXCISE

It could hardly be expected that reaction in the Colony to the Royal Question would be either intense or essentially different from that in the Mother Country. The Belgian population of the Congo may be said to consist of an "elite class" in the sense that they are carefully chosen by the organizations (Government, missions and settlers) they represent and hence tend to have the same general attitude toward metropolitan questions.

Aside from the Catholic Missionaries, of whom a large majority are in favor of the return of Leopold, it would seem that opinion is largely against the return of the present King. Since, however, residents of the Colony have no vote, either locally or in Belgium, it is hardly to be expected that political questions should be hotly debated or arouse passions among them.

[redacted]

The two local papers "Courrier d'Afrique" and "Avenir Colonial Belge" have been engaged in a rather sharp debate on the question, the former being for, and the latter against, the return of the King. Neither has produced anything brilliant or helpful on the question. It is only natural that the "Courrier d'Afrique" should take the royalist side, being the mouthpiece of the Government and the Catholic Church. It is just as natural that the "Avenir Colonial Belge" should take the other side, representing the opposition to both institutions. The latter, however, favors the retention of the monarchy. Most other papers confine

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their treatment of the subject to an objective reporting of the facts. The "Centre Afique" probably represses the views of the average Belgian colonial in the following comments:

"We are neither partisans nor opponents of the return of Leopold III since the details of the problem are too involved for it to be possible to judge the situation sanely from a distance. We have therefore not wanted, during these weeks of shame, to participate in the struggle for or against the personality of the King. Since now, however, the die has been cast, we can say what we think. In the first place, the sense of national dignity has fallen very low in Belgium. How can a government which, itself or its successor, will be tomorrow a royal government; since the principle of the monarchy is not being decided, how has this government been able to tolerate the fact that the person of the King should be pasted on billboards and that under his image, the lowest insults and the most extravagant praises should be put one next to the other:

Belgium had the chance to show to the world how, in its dignity, to put an end to a family discussion. We have not taken advantage of this occasion. In this affair, we could have shown that, in an age of atomic bombs, in a corner of the world, men knew how to judge without hate and without passion. But we have failed miserably; we have shown ourselves small".

William H. Beach

William H. Beach
American Consul General

cc: Brussels.

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